

## **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **STAFF NOTE**

#### **Review Item:**

Update on Kentucky Department of Education Literacy Initiatives

#### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

KRS 158.792 and 704 KAR 3:480 - Reading Diagnostic and Intervention Grants; NCLB-Reading First; KRS 156.553 and 704 KAR 3:490 – Teacher’s Professional Growth Fund; 703 KAR 5:010 – Writing Portfolio Procedures

#### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** A Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) goal in the strategic plan is for every student to read at or above the proficient level. Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff provided a specific update on the Kentucky Read to Achieve grant program and federally funded Reading First Program in the fall of 2006. The purpose of this review item is to provide the KBE with an update on literacy initiatives that are being implemented both internally and with collaborative partners across Kentucky to reach this goal. This overview is the first of a series of three updates on literacy that the KBE will receive over the course of the April 2007, June 2007 and August 2007 KBE meetings. Future presentations will focus on state grant and school level initiatives. At the June 2007 KBE meeting, the Collaborative Center for Literacy Development will present an update of its work, including research in Kentucky schools. Also at the June meeting, the Kentucky Writing Project State Network will present its work related to closing the achievement gap in writing.

The focus for the literacy work was developed in collaboration with the former Kentucky Literacy Partnership, a group representing a consortium of state agencies as part of Kentucky’s participation in federal Title I reading funding. A series of Literacy Summits resulted in the identification of certain conditions that must be met if the state is to realize its objective of being a fully literate population. The basis for these conditions included research on the state and national level and data from the Kentucky Core Content Test, the National Assessment of Educational Progress as well as college readiness assessments, such as the ACT. The statements below, as agreed upon by summit participants, serve as the focus for the KDE literacy work on improving the literacy performance of Kentucky students.

#### **Conditions of Literacy Success**

- Supportive, participating families that value literacy.
- Early diagnosis and evaluation with appropriate individual intervention for students who struggle with literacy at all levels.
- Content area reading and writing instruction in all academic areas.

- Acknowledgement and ownership by communities of the importance of reading and writing that leads to literacy attainment as a means to improve economic development and the quality of life.
- Adequate time devoted to the teaching of reading and writing.
- Engaging instruction in a supportive environment that will motivate students to achieve and to value education.
- Well-prepared and supported teachers at all levels who have a deep understanding and knowledge of the latest research and processes needed to teach students to read and write in all content areas.
- Leadership and policy direction at all levels that support reading and writing and lead to high literacy attainment for all Kentuckians.

Kentucky students are making progress toward every student reading and writing at or above the proficient level on state and national measures; however, the rate of progress still needs to increase. Staff are in the process of critically examining what we know about student performance in reading and writing, the impact of current initiatives, the practices schools are using to increase student performance and close the achievement gaps and the research that informs effective literacy practices and improves student achievement.

Attachments A, B and C provide a snapshot of the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) trend data related to reading and writing. This overall trend data shows:

- from 2000-2006, the percent of fourth grade students scoring proficient or above in reading has increased each year from 57.13 in 2000 to 69.67 percent in 2006
- from 2000-2006, the percent of seventh grade students scoring proficient or above in reading has increased each year from 50.88 in 2000 to 63.00 percent in 2006
- from 2000-2006 the percent of tenth grade students scoring proficient or above in reading has increased each year from 27.50 in 2000 to 40.43 percent in 2006
- students are reaching proficiency on the KCCT in reading at higher rates at the elementary level than at the middle and high school level
- from 2000-2006, the percent of fourth grade students scoring proficient or above in writing has increased each year from 19.89 in 2000 to 47.09 percent in 2006
- from 2000-2006, the percent of seventh grade students scoring proficient or above in writing has increased each year from 10.49 in 2000 to 27.34 percent in 2006
- from 2000-2006, the percent of twelfth grade students scoring proficient or above in writing has increased each year from 20.83 in 2000 to 31.51 in 2006 with the exception of 2004 when there was a slight decrease in the percent of students proficient or above
- students are reaching proficiency on the KCCT in writing at higher rates at the elementary level than at the middle and high school level
- the percentage of students performing at the proficient level and above in reading is greater than the percentage of students performing at the proficient level and above in writing

### **Reading - Trend Data for Demographic Groups**

Elementary reading trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- Elementary reading scores for all demographic groups are improving.
- Elementary schools are reducing the gap in reading scores among students with disabilities more quickly than they are reducing the reading gap in other demographic groups.
- In 2001, the most significant elementary reading gap was among students with disabilities; in 2006, the most significant gap is among African-American students.
- The gap in reading scores among Limited English Proficient (LEP) students at the elementary level is remaining constant at approximately 13 points.

Middle level reading trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- With the exception of reading scores for the Hispanic student population, middle school reading scores are improving.
- Although middle schools are reducing the gap in reading scores among students with disabilities more quickly than they are reducing the reading gap in other demographic groups, the disabilities gap continues to be the most significant middle school reading gap.
- The middle school reading gap increases over time for the Hispanic student population. (It is important to note that Kentucky tested 404 Hispanic middle school students in 2001 and 890 Hispanic middle school students in 2006.)

High school level reading trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- High school reading scores for all demographic groups are improving.
- The gap in high school reading scores remains constant over time for students with disabilities and students who receive free/reduced lunch.
- The gap in high school reading scores increases over time for students with Limited English Proficiency, African-American students and Hispanic students.

Across Elementary – Middle – High School:

- With the exception of the gap in African-American readers at the middle school in 2006, all performance gaps increase from elementary to middle to high. At the same time that these gaps grow, the overall student reading performance decreases from elementary (89.4) to middle (87.2) to high (78.0).
- The most significant increase of performance gaps across grade levels occurs in students with limited English proficiency. The gap grows from 13 at elementary school to 17 at middle school to 32 at high school.

### **Writing - Trend Data for Demographic Groups**

Elementary writing trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- Elementary writing scores for all demographic groups have significantly improved since 2001.
- Performance gaps in elementary writing have decreased in all demographic areas except for the Hispanic student population.

Middle school writing trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- Middle school writing scores for all demographic groups have significantly improved since 2001.
- The performance gap for African-American writers in the middle school has remained constant at 14 points since 2001.
- The performance gaps for students with limited English proficiency and Hispanic students have increased since 2001.

High school writing trend data for demographic groups indicates:

- High school writing scores for all demographic groups have improved since 2001.
- Although the performance gap for writers with disabilities continues to be the most significant gap in high school writing, it has decreased by 8 points since 2001.

Across Elementary – Middle – High School:

- The performance gaps in students with disabilities and students who receive free/reduced lunch increases from elementary to middle to high school.
- Performance gaps for students with limited English proficiency, Hispanic students and African-American students increase from elementary to middle school but then decrease prior to high school.

In addition to the KCCT data, staff has also reviewed and analyzed Kentucky's reading and writing performance on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), see Attachment D, and the ACT, Attachment E.

### **Possible Explanations for the Results in Reading**

Elementary Level:

Since the mid to late 1990's, Kentucky has focused on early literacy through various initiatives and programs such as the Early Reading Incentive Grant Program, Read to Achieve (312 schools), Even Start, Reading Excellence, Reading First (73 schools), the Kentucky Reading Project and other professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. Through these initiatives Kentucky has increased early diagnosis and intervention programs for struggling readers, implemented individual literacy plans, communicated a framework for instruction that focuses on explicit research based instruction on Kentucky's content standards including the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension), provided sustained professional development face-to-face and on-line, supported reading coaches at the school

level for Reading First Schools, emphasized progress monitoring using formative and interim assessments and provided schools with video clips of effective teaching practices in reading.

In addition, the Kentucky Primary Demographic Survey 2005-2006 indicates that 80% of Kentucky elementary schools set aside a 90-120 minute literacy block in the morning when students are at their peak. Reading First funded schools are required to have an uninterrupted block of reading instruction for at least 90 minutes. This data suggests that focused literacy blocks may also contribute to the increase in the percent of students reaching proficiency and above.

School and classroom observations provide supporting evidence that elementary schools focus on:

1. Implementing research-based practices to teach reading.
2. Making instructional decisions based on ongoing use of data.
3. Understanding the reading process and incorporating all elements of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and motivation to read.
4. Sustaining teacher awareness and professional development in teaching reading.
5. Developing literacy instructional leaders, often seen in coaching models.

Adolescent Reading (Middle and High School):

From the mid 1990's until recently, state and federal reading initiatives have focused primarily on early reading and the elementary level. Although there were professional development initiatives such as the Reading Mentors Program, teacher academies, and Teacher Professional Growth Fund incentives targeted at adolescent literacy, there has not been a systemic, coherent and sustained focus on adolescent literacy. Teacher preparation programs rarely require adolescent literacy coursework. Even the National Reading Panel focused first on early literacy. Recently, with the release of reports such as *Reading Next* and *Writing Next*, the attention has shifted from early literacy to both early and adolescent literacy. Although research-based factors for increasing adolescent literacy skills exist, the initiatives and framework described previously for the elementary level are not common at the middle and high school levels. In addition, the emphasis in middle and high school is not typically on reading instruction, but on content area knowledge. As this emphasis shifts, the rigor and complexity of texts increase requiring students to apply their reading strategies more efficiently in content-based materials.

Two promising new initiatives related to adolescent literacy are being implemented in Kentucky schools. The General Assembly targeted a portion of the Teacher Professional Growth Funds to prepare reading coaches in grades 4-12. The first cohort of coaches began their professional development during the summer of 2006. A new cohort of coaches will be selected for the 2007-2008 school year. Kentucky schools received one of the eight federally funded Striving Readers grants. Representatives from the schools participating in the Striving Readers grant will present at the August KBE meeting.

### **Possible Explanations for Results in Writing**

Elementary through High School:

Kentucky has implemented sustained and focused support elementary through high school to assist schools in improving students' writing performance. Early on, Kentucky developed a network of writing cluster leaders both regionally and for each school in the Commonwealth. Other factors that may be contributing to the increase in student performance in writing include:

- The Kentucky Department of Education's writing staff and the Kentucky Writing Project State Network have continued to work collaboratively in order to design and deliver professional development opportunities that will best meet the needs of Kentucky teachers.
- Although some professional development opportunities are designed specifically to meet the needs of teachers of adolescent students, the writing program has noticed that elementary teachers tend to take advantage of optional professional growth opportunities at a higher rate than middle and high school teachers.
- With the support of instructional tools such as the Writing Development Handbook, the Kentucky Writing Marker Papers, and the cluster leader instructional information posted to the KDE website, Kentucky schools continue to receive writing development information.
- Writing cluster leaders and teachers throughout the state have received professional development specific to the analysis of student writing and the process for adapting instruction to meet the needs of students.
- Since the summer of 2005, the Writing Project State Network has provided statewide teacher training in closing achievement gaps through literacy and inquiry strategies.

### **Professional Development--Literacy Initiatives**

Professional development is one key strategy to making sure Kentucky has teachers who have a deep understanding of how to develop students as competent readers and writers.

Attachments F, G and H provide summaries of various literacy initiatives. In future KBE meetings, specific literacy initiatives will be highlighted.

### **Implications for KDE Work**

Some suggestions that could be undertaken by KDE in order to increase student achievement in the area of literacy include:

1. Increasing the momentum towards high literacy attainment by developing administrative support and qualified literacy coaches (an onsite professional developer who partners with educators to identify and assist with the implementation of proven teaching methods ([www.instructionalcoach.com](http://www.instructionalcoach.com)) for each district and school. These two elements are essential for successful literacy implementation.

2. Creating a coherent and specific plan for accelerating professional learning in schools (job-embedded professional development) focused on literacy (reading and writing).
3. Identifying the instructional methods that make a difference to students' success including how to modify strategies to meet the needs of individual students in the classroom and content-based literacy instruction.
4. Expanding the collaborative relationship of KDE with higher education to address literacy issues in teacher preparation programs.
5. Building capacity among education leaders to prepare them to provide analytical, instructional feedback when observing literacy instruction.
6. Given some of the shifts in student performance across grade levels, further analyzing the dropout data to determine whether the decrease in gaps between middle school and high school performance are associated with students simply dropping out of school rather than moving toward proficiency.
7. Expanding professional development for teachers of all content areas in how to instruct students in the three types of writing: writing to learn, writing to demonstrate learning, and writing for publication, as well as more attention to writing in appropriate forms for their content areas, including analytical and technical writing.

**Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

Because the Kentucky Department of Education's literacy initiatives support students from early childhood through high school graduation, they have a strong impact on enabling students to reach proficiency in literacy.

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**Date:**

April 2007